Castlemaine Naturalist

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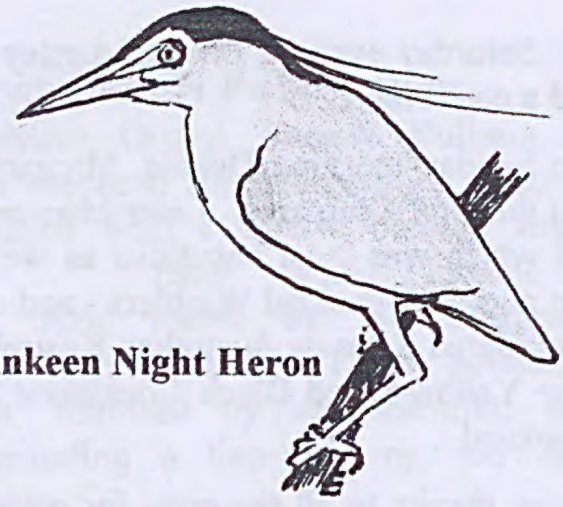

Nankeen Night Heron

BOCA Bird Challenge Count

Many thanks to the twelve volunteers who participated in the December bird count -especially to the recorders of the tally. It was a major effort to record all the numbers being fired at you by the other team members from 8.30am to 5.30pm. Please accept a warm vote of appreciation from us all.

This year Maureen and I got together with Ern and Lesley and revised all our lists and procedures. It is now all on computer and easily accessible for future years and will save many hours of pencil work. Thanks Ern and Lesley.

We now have three full day runs known as the Cairn Curran run, the Mount Alexander run and the Lauriston run and two half day runs including the Colles Rd run and the Botanical gardens run. This year we had sufficient numbers to do the three full day runs and some of the local spots in town were picked up on the Saturday evening and Sunday morning.

The weather was fine and warm but complete cloud cover did not help in identification of canopy birds. It came out quite hot in the afternoon but all in all we had pleasant conditions for the count.

The overall count was very pleasing with the species count of 117 being eight up on last year. The most pleasing aspect was the big increase in the overall bird numbers with 3,467 counted this year compared to 2,367 last year. Slightly better winter and spring conditions and a little more water in most storages would account for some of the increase. Most species had an increase in numbers with honeyeaters and lorikeets being among the highest. The endangered or threatened species still recorded low or nil numbers.

Ern, Lesley and Rita tackled the newly formed Mt Alexander run and returned with very good numbers of both species and birds. The Lauriston run was done by Nigel Harland, George Broadway and Robyn and Bill van Smeerdijk and as is the way of birding, despite their vigorous searching, the numbers were somewhat down on their usual levels. That's birding! Maureen, Debbie Worland and I did the Cairn Curran run with good numbers, due in part to large numbers of water birds near the Yacht Club.

On Saturday evening Ern and Lesley went down to the Botanical Gardens and did a count there.

On Sunday morning Debbie, Margaret Badminton , Nola Cairn and I checked out the Golf Club area. Later Maureen and I went to the pine block off Daltons Rd which was most beneficial as we found varied Sittellas and Scarlet Robins but alas, no Speckled Warblers - and once again no Wedge-tailed Eagles, Black-shouldered Kites or Australian Kestrels and only small numbers of other raptors. The Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos are in the area again but alas not on this weekend.

Many thanks to all the crew for covering such a large area so thoroughly. It is not only valuable in the project of bird conservation and numbers but is also one of the highlights in the Castlemaine Field Naturalist's year.

We will be looking for even more observers next year to fill all the runs, so think about it and BE IN IT!!!

P.S. I am getting a little worried about sending people south on the Lauriston run! A couple of years ago the team came back with a report of a WHITE SWAN!! This year Robyn and Bill and crew came back with a report of a pair of ROSY CHEEKED LOVE BIRDS!! Is it something in the air down there?

Maureen and Ken Dredge

St George's Lake, Creswick. 11/12/04 Leader: Chris Morris

Our end of year outing was a very pleasant walk around St. George's Lake. Together with Chris, Helen, Ern, Lesley, Audrey, George, Rita and Natalie, I listed many birds and plants as we wandered along the shady banks of the lake. Highlights included a Nankeen Night Heron that flew over the lake, a pair of Satin Flycatchers and a patch of Xanthorrhoea minor that Ern discovered towards the end of our walk.

Bird List

Blackbird, Brown Thornbill, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Yellow Robin, Eurasian Coot, Golden Whistler, Grey Fantail, Grey Shrike-thrush, White-naped and Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Nankeen Night-heron, Pacific Black Duck, Rufous Whistler, Satin Flycatchers, Sparrow, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Superb Fairy-wren, White-breasted Scrub-wren, Wood Duck.

Plant List (botanical lists available)

Black-anther Flax-lily, Blue Pincushion, Bluebell sp, Button Everlasting, Chocolate lily, Common Tussock-grass, Gahnia, Grass Trigger-plant, Hedgehog Grass, Hop Goodenia, Ivy-leaf Violet, Maidenhair Fern, Matted Bossiaea, Native Cypress, Necklace Fern, Prickly Starwort, Shiny Cassinia, Slender Lagenifera, Slender Rice-flower, Small Poranthera, Small St John's Wort, Tall daisy, Tall Rush, Wiry Buttons, Small Grass-tree

Geraldine Harris

Praise Indeed for Castlemaine FN Publications

An extract from the Australasian Native Orchid Society Bulletin, Feb 2005, about the names of orchids, and the need for conservation education. "Conservation must be carefully managed with a clearly defined strategy if success is to be achieved. .... [and] would include the publication of booklets, similar to those issued by the Castlemaine Field Naturalists, which sell for less than a dollar. These publications always give the common name first, followed by the scientific name, together with relevant information including a line drawing and colour coding."

Editors Note: These excellent booklets are available at meetings, the library and the market building or by phoning Geraldine on 5474 2244.

Bird Camp at Amherst 26-29/11/04

Despite the dryness all around, birds were very much in evidence, including at *Paraweena*, Turnbull's property at Amherst. One of my special experiences there was watching Mistletoe-birds while sitting drinking a cup of tea. At that time there were also Peaceful Doves and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters coming down to drink and bathe in an old bath set into the ground and filled with water and branches.

The sound of the camp for most of us I think would have to have been the constant sound of Peaceful Doves.

Another incident, and probably the highlight of the whole camp, was watching a Blue-faced Honeyeater family in the front yard of a house on Bristol Hill in Maryborough. "Mum" was first seen on the edge of the patio, but eventually flew down to feed the two youngsters sitting on the ground. Soon "Father " also arrived and landed about 6 metres away. The female left the young birds, which seemed to be fully fledged, and flew to him, and promptly begged. I thought that perhaps it was because she was hungry, but someone suggested it would be because she was ready to nest again.

While all this was going on someone had spotted four Musk Lorikeets in a nearby Ironbark, all snuggled up together taking their midday rest, occasionally nuzzling and preening each other.

We had our lunch at the Goldfield's dam, which is about 3 kms. south of the CBD on the Ballarat road. The water level was low but there were still a number of birds, mainly Coots. Afterwards we went for a short walk at the south end of the dam and we saw a family of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, a pair of Olive-backed Orioles and a Yellow Robin sitting on a nest only a few feet from the ground not very far from the walking track. Despite the dryness there was also quite a few flowers recorded.

Rita Mills

Odonata - Dragonflies and Damselflies

Ian Endersby, from Australian Bush Heritage, was our guest speaker for May 2004. His talk on Odonata prompted me to write this article.

There are 72 species of Ondonata in Victoria, 300 in Australia, and between 3-5000 in the world. The order is divided into three suborders: Zygoptera (damselflies), Anisoptera (dragonflies) and the Anisozygoptera (a smaller group of two species from Asia that is intermediate in appearance between the other two suborders). Odonata means, "tooth jaw" and refers to the powerful biting mouthparts of this order.

Odonata are some of the most ancient of insects – recognisable fossils date back 150 million years. While they have become smaller over time their superb design has changed very little. As aerial, visually oriented predators, the adults are strong-flying insects with large eyes, strong mandibles and spiny legs. They also possess many specialisations that reflect their aerial and predatory life.

Dragonflies – (Anisoptera - "unequal wings") are sturdy and highly coloured (males brighter than females) with the hind wings broader than the forewings, wings spread when at rest and eyes close together.
Their thorax is skewed altering their centre of gravity, so that their strong spiny legs are angled forward under the mouth enabling them to cradle their catch, and eat while still on the wing. This tilt also allows the two pair of large wings, both with very complex venation (triangular patterns in dragonflies) to operate independently without causing turbulence problems for each other.
Unlike most insects, dragonflies have direct muscular control of each wing making them one of the most skilled and versatile insects fliers - they can reach up to 54 km/h and stop in an instant – they can hover and even fly backwards and sideways. Their slow wing beat rate makes them quieter giving them excellent hunting advantage.
The head is an excellent piece of engineering wizardry. Suspended on the pointed tip of the thorax, it rests in an upright position under the influence of gravity, acting as a gyroscope to tell the dragonfly which way is up. Sensitive hairs detect if the body strays from the horizontal position and the wings are used to bring the body back into alignment.
Its large compound eyes enable easy detection of predators and prey and their mouthparts are adapted for crushing exoskeletons of insect prey.

Damselflies (Zygoptera - "joined wings") are slimmer, often smaller, and usually fly more slowly than dragonflies. Their eyes are separated and their slender equal-sized wings are usually held together above their body when at rest. Damselflies have quadrilateral patterns in their wing venation.

Dragonflies use a tandem position for mating. The males have accessory genitalia on the underside of their abdomen base and they transfer sperm to these storage sites from the genitalia at the end of their abdomen. When the male

finds a mate he grabs her at the back of the head or prothorax, using appendages on the end of his abdomen. The female then curves her hind up to the male's accessory genitalia to collect sperm resulting in the wheel position. Prior to this the male also spends time removing sperm of any predecessor to ensure his paternity.

Several methods of depositing eggs are employed. Some females use their ovipositor to cut a slit in the stems of reeds to deposit their eggs and others drag their abdomen over the surface of water dropping eggs like a bomber.
Some males retain hold of the female while she lays her eggs to discourage competition from other males and some hover over the female to guard her from other males. In another species the females imitate the males to avoid male harassment.

The aquatic larvae (commonly referred to as "mud-eyes") are predacious and are armed with extendible hinged lower labium (lip) which fold under the chin and can be projected forward to grasp their prey. Larvae are voracious, eating small aquatic insects and crustaceans, tadpoles and even fish. They occur in all kinds of water bodies with some species favouring flowing water and others still water. They are catagorised according to their feeding behaviour: "climbers" are stalkers that live in submerged vegetation; "sprawlers" lie in ambush on the bottom mud; and "burrowers" cover themselves with sand and mud and await their prey.

The maturation period depends on the climate and the species can take between 1-5 years. In damselflies and some species of dragonflies development is rapid with the life cycle taking about a year. Some species overwinter as diapausing eggs, hatching in the spring and emerging as adults in summer. Other species spend winter as larvae and emerge the following spring or summer. Still other species spend two winters as larvae before emerging and some of larger species of dragonfly spend four or five years in the larval stage. There is no pupal or resting stage (ie. they are hemimetabolous). Larvae go through 10-15 instars (larval stages of skin shedding) before emerging as terrestrial adults. As adults, if they escape predators and reach old age, they do not usually live much longer than 10 weeks.

While not generally endangered, their abundance and diversity is at risk because their habitat is being reduced. As genetically unique organisms they have inherent value to biodiversity. Their lavae provide food for growing freshwater fish, the tender bodies of newly hatched adults provide food for birds, and they help to control populations of pests as they prey on a large numbers of mosquitoes and other small flying insects; usually captured in flight.

Geraldine Harris

References: Canning R. A. and S. G. 1998. Odonata (Damselflies and Dragonflies) in Smith I. M. and Scudder G. G. E., eds. *Assessment of species diversity in the Montane Cordillera Ecozone.* Burlington: Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network. 1998.
New T. R., 1995. *Name That Insec.t* – A Guide to the Insects of Southeastern Australia.
Proche J. and Runyan S., 1996. *Natural History Research Paper – Dragonflies of the family Aeshnidae.* 1996.

Observations

- 12/04 **Little Falcon** seen flying over Wheeler St. carrying a Musk Lorikeet. George Broadway
- **Musk Lorikeets** reported feasting on cherry plums. Athol Dorman.
- "Cockies definitely have memories," said Rita Mills, after observing them on a return annual visit to a neighbour's almond tree.
- An **Olive-backed Oriole** has been heard calling at North Castlemaine for the first time in 6 or 7 years over the past month (December). Rita Mills
- There has been a wonderful flowering of the **Mitchell Wattle *Acacia mitchelli*** out at Glenluce this year, particularly along the Glenluce - Malmsbury Road after the bridge over Middletons Creek. There has also been many **Hyacinth Orchids *Dipodium sp*** reported by Larry Kinross and Marion Cooke on the Yapeen - Muckleford Road, and there's been quite a good flowering along the race from Poverty Gully Road down to the Eureka car park. Rita Mills.
- **Australian Hobby** observed along Forest Creek towards Chinamans Point. At Newcomb Street a **Shining Bronze Cuckoo** flew inside through open doors and then crashed trying to get out. After thorough examination from all angles and some photographic studies, the bird was left on a raised surface outside – later on it had gone. Chris Morris
- A vividly coloured **Mistletoebird** was found stunned below windows at Barkers Creek. While moving it to safety it sat on my palm and then on a Callistemon branch for a photo session. Then it flew off suddenly over the house and into the Mistletoe in the large trees alongside the water race. Geraldine Harris
- Hans and Anne van Gemert have a resident **echidna** in their garden.
- Richard Piesse has observed a surprising amount of late flowering plants while working on the last section of the Walking Trail in the Lerderderg Gorge. These included **Mint Bushes, Bluebells, Trigger Plants, Leptospermums** and **Dianellas**. (New maps of the trail are available at the Market)
- **Yellow Rush-lilies**, with their simple yellow flowers that twist when spent, were a pleasant surprise while walking our bush paddock in early January. Geraldine Harris.

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

From the Business Meeting 27/1/05

- **Congratulations to Hayden Smith**, who was the recipient of the **Castlemaine Field Naturalists Prize** at the Castlemaine Secondary College Awards Evening 2004. Hayden has written to the thank the club for his award which he will put towards his college fees this year. He admits to a "bit of an interest" in environmental matters. As a member of the Environmental Corps he has planted trees at the College, and at Daylesford and Strathfieldsaye. He is also a senior member of the Campbells Creek Fire Brigade and the Strathfieldsaye Venturer Scouts. Well done, Hayden.
- **Congratulations to Greg Binns**, a well known Ballarat Field Naturalist, who has received an **Order of Australia** award for his service to the community of Ballarat, particularly in Environmental, Arts and Heritage Organisations.
- CFNC is going to make a **submission to Mt Alexander Shire Council** regarding the **Planning Scheme Amendment C24** in support of a buffer zone wherever new residential subdivision will be adjoining National Parks or Conservation Reserves. A copy of the submission will be available at the February meeting.
- CFNC to support TSN in its request to have the **Swift Parrot Management Plan** incorporated as a reference document for the **Mt Alexander Shire Municipal Strategic Statement.**
- **Sat. Feb.19. Dawn Breakfast** at Glenluce Springs. 630 -7am . BYO everything. (See Programme on page 8.)
- **Subscriptions are now due**. It is recommended that they remain the same as 2004 (see Subscriptions on page 8).

Extra Events

Jan. 20. – Feb. 27. Exhibition at Saffs Café a series of photographs taken by eight young people from the Mount Alexander Shire: (Leah Alder, Jaime Appleby, Nicole Clutterbuck, Lilly Falconer, Orien Goulding, Jade Krol, Kalia Laycock-Walsh and Jayde Parkman) celebrating the efforts and achievements of active and dedicated volunteers in our community:
Frances Cincotta, Maurie Dynon, Ian Higgins, Rachel Legge, David Paez, Margaret Panter, Ern and Lesley Perkins, Doug Ralph, Debbie Worland.

Articles Welcome - Articles, reports and observations can be left at Tonks Bros. in Barkers St. or sent to Geraldine Harris, P.O.Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450. Ph. 5474 2244, or gedharris@castlemaine.net
Please submit articles by the fourth Thursday of the month.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme
February 2005

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.
Excursions are usually on the Saturday following the general meeting and leave promptly at the times stated from The Octopus, opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days. BYO morning and afternoon tea.
Business meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.
VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS.

Fri. Feb. 11. AGM Election of Office Bearers and Committee. Followed by:
Sri Lanka: Elephants, Peacocks and the Rest. Jason Edwards, Wildlife photographer. UCA Hall, 8pm.
Sat. Feb. 12. Malmsbury Reservoir and Gardens. Leader: George Broadway, Ph. 5472 2513. Leave Octopus at 1.30pm sharp.
Sat. Feb. 19. DAWN BREAKFAST AT GLENLUCE SPRINGS. Meet at the springs at 6.30-7pm. Left at Five Flags Store Campbells Creek, right at T intersection, past Irishtown, left at island. Look for sign on right. Bring your own breakfast and binocs. Contact Geraldine Ph. 5474 2244.
Fri. Mar. 11. Mt. Alexander Goldfields. Deidre Slattery. UCA Hall, 8pm.
Sat. Mar. 12. Macedon Regional Park Foothills. Leader: Richard Piesse, Ph. 5472 3191. Leave the Octopus at 1.30pm sharp.
Fri. Apr. 8. Mistletoes. Lindy MacRaild, Biodiversity Team, Deacon Uni. UCA Hall, 8pm.
Sat. Apr. 9. Habitat - Along Forest Creek to Chinaman's Point. Leader: Chris Morris, Ph. 9885 4221. Leave Octopus at 1.30pm. sharp.

2004 Committee - Chris Morris (President) Ph. 9885 4221; Rita Mills (Vice President and Public Officer) Ph. 54724553; George Broadway (Secretary) Ph. 5472 2513; Hans van Gemert (Treasurer) Ph. 5472 1082; Geraldine Harris (Newsletter Ed.) Ph. 5474 2244; Ern Perkins Ph. 5472 3124; Richard Piesse Ph.5472 3191; Athol Dorman and Nigel Harland.

Recommended Subscriptions for 2005
Ordinary membership: Single $22, Family $30
Pensioner or student: Single $19, Family $24
The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist.*

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